

UPDATE

Urinary Tract Infections: A Common Problem for Some Women

What causes urinary tract infections?

Bacteria cause most urinary tract infections. Any part of your urinary tract can become infected. The urinary tract includes the kidneys, ureters, bladder and urethra. Bladder infections are the most common.

How do I know if I have a urinary tract infection?

The box below lists possible signs of a bladder infection. Nausea, lower back pain and fever may be signs of a kidney infection. Call your doctor if you have any of these symptoms.

- A burning sensation when you urinate
- Feeling like you need to urinate more often than usual
- Feeling the urge to urinate but not being able to
- Leaking a little urine
- Urine that smells bad
- Cloudy, dark or bloody urine

How are urinary tract infections treated?

If your family doctor thinks you have a bladder infection, he or she will probably test a sample of your urine to find out if there are bacteria in it. Your doctor will then prescribe an antibiotic for you if you have an infection. Usually, symptoms of the infection go away 1 to 2 days after you start taking the medicine.

Your doctor may also suggest a medicine to numb your urinary tract and make you feel better while the antibiotic starts to work. The medicine colors your urine bright orange, so don't be alarmed by the color when you urinate.

How serious are urinary tract infections?

Bladder infections can be painful. But today's medicines can keep them from becoming a serious threat to your health. The kidneys can also be infected and this can be a more serious problem.

Kidney infections (Pyelonephritis) usually require an antibiotic for a longer time and are sometimes treated in the hospital. Symptoms and signs include back, side, and groin pain; urgent, frequent urination; pain or burning during urination; fever; nausea and vomiting; and pus and blood in the urine. Diagnosis is made with a urine test to identify bacteria and formations of white blood cells, called casts, shaped like tubes in the kidneys. If an infection cannot be easily cured, x rays might be done to look for abnormalities in the kidneys, ureters, and bladder. A kidney infection is treated with an appropriate antibiotic, and abnormalities may need to be surgically treated. An untreated or recurrent kidney infection can lead to chronic pyelonephritis, scarring of the kidneys, and permanent kidney damage.

Contact the National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Clearinghouse at <http://kidney.niddk.nih.gov/index.htm> to receive more information.

